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Advocacy Monthly



STS Urges CMS to Expand Lung Cancer Screening Coverage

As the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) considers expanding coverage for lung cancer screening with low-dose computed tomography (LDCT), STS, the American College of Radiology (ACR), and the GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer submitted [official comments](#) supporting the change. The three organizations had urged CMS to reopen the National Coverage Determination and match the newly expanded screening criteria from the US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). In the comment letter, the organizations also urged CMS to launch a public health awareness campaign targeted at patients and providers. A decision from CMS is expected by November, and the process should be completed by February 2022.

STS, ACR, and GO2 also are pushing major payers to adopt the revised USPSTF recommendations. So far, Aetna—which currently covers more than 22 million Americans through its medical plans—has agreed to expand coverage for annual LDCT lung cancer screening exams.

Coalition Resumes Fight Against Drastic Medicare Cuts

Ahead of the proposed Physician Fee Schedule rule expected from CMS in July, the Surgical Care Coalition (SCC), of which STS is an active member, is amping up efforts to protect patient access to surgical care. The group is working toward preventing the payment cuts for cardiothoracic surgical care that are scheduled to take effect

on January 1, 2022. Over the past year, STS—individually and as part of the Coalition—launched comprehensive advocacy efforts that successfully, but temporarily, halted the reduction.



Share Patient Stories to Show Legislators the Value of Surgery

One way you can help is to share story ideas about particularly impactful surgeries so that policymakers on Capitol Hill can understand more about the value of cardiothoracic surgery. The best stories are the ones you find memorable or in which you have a strong patient connection. Stories about Medicare patients in the past 2 years would be especially helpful. **Submit your ideas by July 14**

to advocacy@sts.org. Please do not include any identifiable patient information. If your story is selected, SCC staff may contact you for more information and include your story in SCC communications.

STS/ISHLT Webinar to Examine Removal of HVAD from Market

Join us tomorrow for an important webinar about Medtronic's recent announcement that it's halted the production and distribution of its HeartWare Ventricular Assist Device (HVAD) System. [HVAD Is Off the](#)

[Market—Now What?](#) will feature a panel of experts, including from industry, who will provide American and European perspectives on the situation, reveal data from the STS Intermacs Database on the risks and benefits of exchanging the HVAD system, and offer advice on the management of HVAD patients. The webinar, hosted by STS and the International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation, will be **Tuesday, June 29, at 4:00 p.m. ET.** [Access it via Zoom](#) or watch live on [the Society's Facebook page](#).

New Legislation Would Make VHA Facilities Officially Smoke Free

More than 50 health care organizations, including STS, sent [letters to House and Senate leaders](#) in “strong support” of [bipartisan legislation](#) that officially would make Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities completely smoke free. In 2019, the VHA determined that exposure to secondhand smoke creates “unacceptable medical risks” for veterans seeking care at VHA facilities and directed all VHA facilities to be smoke free by October 2019. The legislation gives this directive “the force of law” and would repeal an antiquated 1992 law that requires the VHA to provide and maintain designated indoor or outdoor smoking areas. For more information on the Society’s anti-tobacco efforts, visit sts.org/tobaccopaper.

Medical Orgs Share Recommendations for Improving APMs

STS, the American Medical Association, and other medical organizations sent a [letter to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation \(CMMI\)](#) detailing ways to better alternative payment models (APMs). These suggestions include improvements to the design and implementation of APMs, ways to increase transparency, providing adequate resources to help practices achieve better health outcomes for high-risk patient populations, and extending incentive payments for APM participation. The group also requested greater physician engagement when developing APMs, “We believe that utilizing models

designed by practicing physicians will enable CMMI to accelerate value-based payment and care delivery for patients with Medicare and Medicaid.”

Congress Addresses Prior Authorization Reform

The Society has joined a long list of organizations in support of the [Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act](#) (H.R. 3173)—bipartisan legislation that would make care more efficient for seniors by reforming prior authorization. Specifically, the bill would streamline and standardize the way Medicare Advantage plans use prior authorization and increase oversight and transparency around prior authorization. The bill recently was introduced in the House by Representatives Suzan DelBene (D-WA), and Mike Kelly (R-PA), as well as STS Legislator of the Year recipients Ami Bera (D-CA) and Larry Bucshon (R-IN).

Key Contact Spotlight

Stephen J. Lahey, MD
Chair, STS Workforce on Health Policy, Reform, and Advocacy



“If issues arise that threaten your cardiothoracic surgery practice or your patients’ access to quality health care, you have two choices: 1) uselessly ‘howl at the moon’ or 2) personally interact with your legislators and present a compelling argument for change. If Congress doesn’t hear from us—and I can assure you, they listen—they will never understand the problem or the need for legislative intervention.”

For more information on how to get involved in advocacy and health policy, visit sts.org/advocacy.



**The Society
of Thoracic
Surgeons**

633 N. Saint Clair St., Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611
312-202-5800



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